

C.S. Lewis: A Journey With Me

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

C.S. Lewis is a scholar and author most popularized in the Christian culture. His works range from childhood fantasy to theological substance. Although his works are utilized by many institutions, the conversion of Lewis has served as a beacon of inspiration for many as an atheist turned believer. The experiences in his own life shaped the subjects and discussion within his writings, and I think his journey in life speaks volumes through his books. The works I plan to experience are *The Abolition of Man*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles*, *A Grief Observed*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Great Divorce*, and *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*. I hope to join his journey and take along my readers to read his theological works and study his biography, documenting my developments and sharing my journey as well. I will address seven different subjects of change within my life which are as follows: Pain & Sanctification, Selfishness, Emotions, Faith Reason & Science, Once Saved Always Saved, Surrender, and Hope.

Acknowledgments

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Process Analysis Statement

As I was considering my approach to this project, I realized the personal effect it could have on my life as well as the vulnerability I would need to go through with my task. In the world today, religion has become a divisive issue. However, it is something I am truly passionate about and have been around my entire life. Each person has a different experience with it, and I wanted to do my best to relate to as many people as possible even from a small perspective like mine. I also know that no person and no person's story is too small for others to hear and learn from. With that being said, there will be words and phrases that are regularly used within a church context and may not make sense to those who have not had that experience. I will do my best to explain these items to make it more understandable. While doing this, I still want to preserve my personal perspective as a believer who grew up in the church and share how it applies to a life like my own.

C.S. Lewis is an author I have known throughout my entire life. My parents would read the *Chronicles of Narnia* series to me and my siblings at night, or we would listen to the books on our trips. Those stories and movies became a favorite in our family and for me. For me personally, they were a new world to dive into and explore, a fantasy to enjoy. The movies were powerful, but I never understood the smaller themes that pointed to a bigger picture. I experienced these when I read the entirety of the series about Narnia. Lewis expertly wove the many treasures of Christianity into a story of a different world and new creatures. Reading the *Narnia* series incited many strong emotions in me, seeing facts that I knew from childhood and church come to life in a whole new way. Knowing how much of an impact it had on me over time, I wanted to do something similar, documenting the changes his works may spur in my life.

Additionally, I wanted to know about the life and journey of C.S. Lewis and his conversion. Many religious leaders have put much confidence in his writings, and other than his fictional works, I did not know what credibility he had with those writings. I had never read his theological work and wanted to experience it for myself. By beginning with a biography written by a couple of his close friends, I felt like I could get to know how Lewis's life was lived from a child to the end of his life. His experiences could have a lot to do with the words that he wrote, which is something I want to connect and relate to. I decided to begin with his biography to give me a better picture of who he was as a person and to relate to his past and experiences. Lewis can easily be seen as a glorified person in history, but some of the most vulnerable parts of a person can have the greatest impact on others.

I continued to brainstorm on which of his books would prove to be the most impactful. Since I had already read the Narnia series, I chose not to include them within this experience. I instead chose the more theological works that present new ideas and theories with which many people and churches grasped as a new understanding of Christianity. Additionally, the *Space Trilogy* also had a fantastical and imaginative plot that would be more of an outlier in the scope of all that I intended to read. After making that decision, I landed on seven books by C.S. Lewis that I could experience and add to my own life journey. The works are as follows: *The Problem of Pain*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Abolition of Man*, *The Great Divorce*, *Miracles*, *Mere Christianity*, and *A Grief Observed*.

Some of these texts can be easily understood as being proofs or arguments for the Christian beliefs, and Lewis's biography contains many of his own writings to his friends. Two of Lewis's closest friends wrote his biography by using many of their correspondences from him. Even though they related who C.S. Lewis was throughout his life, much of what they did to

describe him was from his own words and actions. When I refer to these, many of them are accounts from Lewis himself documented by his friends which is why they may be accompanied with what Lewis had actually said rather than what his friends said about him. However, there are some books that are more abstract than just arguments and instead paint a picture through a fictional story while communicating deep theological ideas. When referring to them, I hope to give you the context necessary to understand my thoughts. The first text I will break down is *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis wrote this book from the perspective of a demon, Screwtape, who is advising his nephew, Wormwood, in stealing a man's soul. The man is understood as Wormwood's patient, and Lewis tries to speculate what kind of tactics may be used in one's life to turn him or her away from the truth. God in this case is referred to as the enemy. The next book I want to address is *The Great Divorce*. Lewis uses this short story to compare his visions of Heaven and Hell. A bus from Hell takes anyone who wants to go to Heaven to there to experience it. If they choose to stay, they can and if not, they may return. Lewis addresses all kinds of people and perspectives on what these places may look like and tries to get us to experience it as well.

After reading Lewis's biography, I moved on to the most popular theological works he wrote in his lifetime in chronological order to seek a development of his thoughts through time. There were some difficulties within this process as the biography related that Lewis worked intermittently on some of his works simultaneously, so the ability to create a thought process out of his works proved to be difficult. I was able to relate some of the bigger events in his life to the different teachings he presented in certain works. I think these works have invaluable philosophical discussions about pain, absolute truth, religion, and a fight between good and evil. Lewis refers to other schools of thought, including Nietzsche and Hume's perspectives on life and

philosophy. The more perspectives we encounter, the better we can determine what may be true or accurate. Based on what I believe, there is only one work that has all truth and that is the Bible. Accordingly, I confess that I did not begin my process by assuming that all the things Lewis theorized, addressed, and stated were true and right. Lewis was a renowned scholar who contributed to extensive theological arguments, and I did my best to maintain that view of him as both a scholar and a human who makes mistakes like everyone else. If I were to take everything he said as fact, I would take away the opportunity of growth and thought for both myself and the reader. By keeping these things in mind, I hope to keep an open mind and not assume everything he says as solid truth. I desire to be challenged and moved to think deeply about how his ideas apply to my life and hopefully do the same for the readers.

As I began reading his works, I continually took note of the things that stood out to me, spoke to me, or related to my own personal life. I also wanted to address how they connected to Lewis's life experiences in the times they occurred. Journaling these steps allowed me to process what I was taking in and see how it could make a difference in my life journey. Some books spoke to me more than others and each in their own unique ways. I recognized some similarities between his writings as well as drastic differences. A couple of them had a sole focus of convincing the reader of the supernatural or the proof of God. Others were allegorical discussions of theology that tried to connect to personal or fictional context yet had the purpose of shifting one's perspective.

What I found most interesting about my process of experiencing Lewis's thoughts and positions were how interrelated it came to be with my hobbies. I will refer to these in some of my writings. A couple of men, Rhett and Link, who found their fame on YouTube began a podcast that recently took a deep turn on vulnerability. Their content has always entertained me as well

as their podcasts, and the subject of their newer talk show was that of their religious upbringing as well as its deconstruction. I had always assumed what had happened in their spiritual journeys in the past, but they never reflected on it in the public eye. Finally, they opened up about their experiences which had a profound connection with some of what Lewis discussed in his works as well as getting me to grapple with theological issues that seem to never be solved within my own mind. Their content will also be referred to when bringing up the topics of faith. They will not serve as a sole purpose but instead as a strong support to the words of Lewis and the effect on my experience within his writing.

After going through this project, I recognized my tendency to hesitate on Lewis's assertions based on reasoning, science, and logic. Although my classes have given me substantial exposure to philosophers from different eras as well as different schools of thought, I felt as though my knowledge was not sufficient to state a case or truth that I found within Lewis's works. Many of them were quite compelling, but I recognize that it is not my area of study nor passion. I address some of these ideas in my work, but I kept myself from plunging into his explanations of the truth. As much as I agree with his beliefs, I also am not in a position to say whether his reasoning was absolutely sound. I would hope that through my experience others would begin to be open to taking the same journey, or if they are intrigued with the reasoning, be inspired to read Lewis's works for themselves and consider whether they have similar explanations.

My hope throughout this project was to create a platform for myself to reflect on the experiences within my readings and the things going on around me and within my life. I think some of this stemmed from a desire to some day create a blog or platform for which I can process my thoughts and share things that I learn or with which I struggle. I believe this to be an

exciting experience that takes me out of my comfort zone to have confidence in my words and thoughts. I stressed before how everyone has a story and has worth, and it is something I must remind myself of everyday. I hope my experience encourages others to do the same with whatever subject they feel most passionate and curious about in their lives. I have structured my work based on the most prominent themes and ideas I have gleaned from Lewis's works and my own life in the process. Each section introduces the theme and describes Lewis's thoughts and experiences, my own thoughts and experiences, and what truth or perspective it may provoke from my journey.

A Journey with C.S. Lewis and Me

Each moment in our lives contributes to who and what we become in the future. C.S. Lewis became a very well-known man through his writings (both fiction and nonfiction), his perspective on the Christian faith through his conversion, and his impact on education. Each moment in Lewis's life made a difference in his future and affected the way he viewed the world both before and after he became a Christian. We all go through this journey called life trying to determine our values, changing as we learn and experience more. Each life is different and progresses in different ways. I sought change in my life through Lewis's works, allowing them to sink in, discerning their applicability to my life, and deciding if they were truths to accept or things to set aside. All I ask is for others to be open up in this journey, desire to learn from him and even from me- both the faults and successes in my own life. Lewis's perspective is unique; the encounters that made the most impact in his past were woven into similar experiences in the future. I hope to be enlightened within my own life and see more complexities and beauty in the path we are each taking.

Pain & Sanctification

Lewis's experience with death, pain, and suffering molded him into the scholar that he became. Those painful moments can be the most debilitating and yet the most stimulating times in our life to boost growth and strength. Lewis lost his mother to cancer at a young age, and the loss of his father's relationship soon followed. His mind was like no other, and he started writing short stories at the age of six. His early development caused so much attention and disconnect that his classmates treated him as an outcast, never fitting in, and he had many health issues. Additionally, he served in the war along with his brother, and saw the toll it takes on a man

(Green & Hooper 1974). His perspective began to change from a Christian worldview to that of an atheist. He then lost his wife to cancer at a time when he was a long-time believer.

I experience so much sympathy with these pains, but I hesitate to compare my pains to those. My own pains have been different, but the struggles that come have been the same. I have lost people to cancer, and at this point in our lifetime, I wonder who has not. I was very young, and the grief did not weigh heavily on me. My aunt's death exuded celebration and joy as that is how she wanted to enter heaven. My grandmother's death was a process of acceptance, dying at an old age; I am lucky to have had so much time with her in my life. The pains that have affected me the most are those inflicted by other people. It was the betrayal, the harsh comments, and the lack of depth in my friendships. They were the times of confusion and times of the unknown where I experienced the most pain. And yet, Lewis throughout his life, addressed the importance of these sufferings, giving people a new perspective.

I also had to wonder what it must have been like to watch the second World War rage on with all of the pain while writing *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Problem of Pain*, and *The Abolition of Man*. Having had a short stint in the English army, Lewis saw war and recognized it as a potential stumbling block for believers. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape advises his nephew to make sure his patient focuses on the false hopes, a false light at the end of the tunnel. By giving small amounts of relief in short periods of time, they hoped to tempt the patient to just give up on what the world is actually like after seeing so much pain and violence (Lewis, 1942). Lewis also recognized that same pain within war as an opportunity for growth and strength.

Lewis wrote two books focusing on grief and suffering: *A Grief Observed* and *The Problem of Pain*. He wrote the former to process the death of his wife and the latter even before her death to address the general issue of suffering in the world. In such a raw state of mind Lewis

described himself in the midst of suffering as concussed, fearful, and uninterested (Lewis, 1961, pg. 3). He shared his doubts and his thoughts of how a good God could take someone so dear from his life. Even after his long years of devotion to God, questions would still arise, doubts would still creep in. Lewis was not worried about ceasing to believe but believing “dreadful things about Him” (Lewis, 1961, pg. 6). I have recognized in my own life not an issue of whether I truly believe, but whether I recognize the truth of who God is. Experiencing pain manipulates the mind, and we are not always thinking rationally. As Lewis continued to journal, he began to realize that these times of suffering are not good, but they are opportunities for growth. Liking God to a surgeon, “The kinder and more conscientious he is, the more inexorably he will go on cutting” (Lewis, 1961, pg. 43). Suffering is not good, but it brings about good. It gives people the opportunity to submit to something greater than themselves which is God. He uses simple evil to make complex good (Lewis, 1940). The pain is not a burden we must carry all alone or even forever.

I imagined what it must have been like to have already written about pain and suffering and then to experience the worst of it later in life. I wonder if his own words came back to him, trying to recognize what perspective he had before experiencing such deep hurt and suffering. However, knowing the right perspective before painful events may prepare someone for it. But if we do not choose to apply the knowledge we already have to circumstances that are thrown at us in life, we can lose the chance to heal and grow from pain in a way that is most beneficial. Lewis’s own experience with pain could have provided him with a new perspective of suffering itself. In this case, I think he was able to process his doubts and figure out how his earlier thoughts about pain could apply to him in the moment. I think he comes to the same conclusions to help him heal.

One thing that stood out to me about *A Grief Observed* was the idea that this book has the potential to make the most impact on other people's lives through Lewis's vulnerability, yet churches and other institutions hardly look to it for growth. Knowing a man like C.S. Lewis was doubting the truth in his life and knowing the raw pain he was feeling makes him so much more relatable. He has a story of loss that brings power and perspective on death and suffering. Even for unbelievers, his words carry encouragement and motivation to continue one's life even through experiencing grief. He empathizes with those who have a hard time finding someone who may understand the hurt they are experiencing. In this sense, I hope to point people toward this text as a way to process and heal from a loss.

Sanctification, or the conforming of one's life to Christ, can be a path to take as a result of pain. Growth and strength can come from this. I believe most people desire to be better than they were yesterday, to constantly improve and make a better impact on people now than they did before. It is a perfection of our poor, natural instincts of anger and violence. This perfection is painful, as much as there is pain in perfecting one's skills for a sport or skill. However, it is worth the pain. And this is the hope that believers share, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18 English Standard Version). Pain can be a means toward an end, a chance to improve and perfect oneself. This perspective can heal and protect people from the initial blow of pain, recognizing it as an opportunity and time to come out of it better than ever.

Sanctification also comes in the form of discipline as a result of wrong. If we devote ourselves to a certain set of ideals or morals, we must correct ourselves when we do not adhere to them. If those standards are truly imbedded as a priority, discipline must occur to attain and become what we strive to be. As a believer, we experience this discipline or pain following

actions that are not of God's standards. The hope is to create habits of turning away from those imperfect instincts and refine them to be perfect (Lewis, 1940, pg. 13). A popular analogy comes from a father-son relationship. Discipline represents an act of love. To not correct a child when doing wrong shows a lack of care for the child from the father. In this same way, God loves us too much to fall into the wrong ways of life. He desires us to be good and perfect like Him and never give up on it. "And that is why tribulations cannot cease until God either sees us remade or sees that our remaking is now hopeless" (Lewis, 1940, pg. 107). The only thing that prevents this is one's own will. We have every choice to not accept the discipline or not hold ourselves accountable to any certain morals. Each person must decide whether a set of standards should be lived by or not. However, progress and growth seem to be accepted as good among people of different beliefs. "We find the reality in which to participate is to be truly human: the real common growing like a tree, and branching out, as the situation varies, into ever new beauties and dignities of application" (Lewis, 1944, pg. 75).

Selfishness

Referred to as "the Great Sin" in *Mere Christianity*, selfishness is the spiritual cancer of life (Lewis, 1952, pg. 125). Lewis even recognized it throughout his own life. When dealing with his mother's death, he observed a change in his father. He had a "pathological hatred of taking any step which involved a break in the dull routine of his daily existence" (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 57). Lewis yearned for his father's sympathy and love because the only schedule his father cared about was his own. When he lost his faith as a young child, he described his unbelieving life as one focused only on himself. As a result, he found himself with "the desire for glitter, swagger, distinction, the desire to be in the know...I began to labour very hard to make myself into a fop, a cad, and a snob" (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 31). By dealing with his

insecurities as a child, he turned his unhappiness into “priggish superiority” (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 39). Looking back on his life, he recognized the selfishness of his life when he left what he recognized was the most important thing in life itself. Lewis came from a reputable university, known for his intelligence even at a young age. His environment could have fostered the perspective of superiority and selfishness. Pretention can even come into play.

I believe selfishness has the potential to be the one thing that most people can agree on what it looks like. Everyone experiences it and sees it in the world. If we cannot be bonded on what makes us happy, we may well end up bonding over what we hate the most: selfishness. In his biography, he viewed selfishness in an in depth way, even before he became a Christian. “Depth under depth of self-love and self-admiration...Pride... is the mother of all sins, and the original sin of Lucifer- so you are rather better off than I am. You at your worst are an instrument unstrung: I am an instrument strung but preferring to play itself because it thinks it know the tune better than the Musician” (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 106). I have also dealt with possessiveness of my time like Lewis’s father did. In the past, I have learned that being possessive and controlling over my time and routine is not a characteristic of which God approves. There is a difference between being organized and controlling. Lewis recognized this attitude as a strategy to turn people away from the truth. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape encouraged Wormwood to allow the patient to think “My time is my own” (Lewis, 1942, pg. 114). As a result, one carries a great selfishness over their own time. I have learned that if we become extremely busy with that time, not taking it for other people but only ourselves, it can be phrased as **Being Under Satan’s Yoke**. Living in this way can give Satan a foothold in our lives, and we are carrying more than what has been asked of us.

Lewis dealt with this in almost every facet, combating it with as many options as possible. He addressed selfishness even within having faith. “Once you have made the world an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man” (Lewis, 1942, pg. 34). If our intention in life, whether a believer or not, is to win the world or be the best, the tempter has the victory. When we make it about ourselves, we have lost. Lewis’s used the phrase “orgy of egoism” to describe the accumulation of selfishness within one’s life. Everything has its danger, even good things, and the ego can come in, but it shouldn’t keep us from doing good things” (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 198). Even the good in the world can lead us to a life devoted to one’s self depending on the choices made. He even discussed how people run with the virtue of humility and turn it into something for themselves. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the demon desires his patient to think in this way: being prideful of his own humility (Lewis, 1942, pg. 69).

I have had my fair share of experience with this in my own life. As I grew up, I became the type of person who refused to let anyone down. I always did the right things because I felt like that was the only way to live. Following the rules became my way of life. As I recognize that it has kept me from certain pain, it has also led me to rely on my own actions and feeling better than others. I took pride when I did not get in trouble in school or at home. I thought it was the greatest asset to have and that I deserve to be rewarded for it. It skewed my view on what life truly means. I began to feel worthy of what God did for me, as if I had earned my spot in heaven for my journey in always following the rules. However, I realized that my intentions through it all proved selfish and that was the worst sin or wrong to deal with. As Lewis phrased it, I had to “recover the sense of guilt” (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 202).

Comparison become another facet of selfishness that Lewis addressed. He became disappointed in the lack of fame he felt he had through his works. He wanted to be more, to be

better. The process was slow for him. He began to realize that fame wasn't everything in the world and saw it as an opportunity for freedom and to focus on what is important. "In heaven, there would be no such infamy and status among men. That's not what mattered anymore" (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 110). We are forced to look at other people, driven to become the perfect posterchild of business, fame, or knowledge. The standards set by the culture we live in today encourage this rotting behavior of comparison.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis points this out as the demon directs his nephew to play upon the patient's pride. The patient who is involved in a relationship constantly compares his own service and "good works" to that of his partner. Before recognizing his own issues or selfishness, he projects it onto his other half regarding the other as "radically selfish" to justify his own pride and anger (Lewis, 1942, pg. 142). In doing so, we see the faults of others more easily than our own. Lewis describes this as the "illusion of corporate guilt before personal guilt" (Lewis, YEAR 1940, pg. 54). This idea is that we justify the sin we recognize in our own lives by embellishing the sins of those around us. Additionally, a woman touring Heaven and given the choice to stay if she wants cannot help but compare herself to those who have been in Heaven longer than herself. Their bodies were functioning properly and looked different. She could not take her focus off of how she looked compared to others that she missed the beauty that was right in front of her. As a result, she chose to go back to Hell, a comforting yet dreary place.

As a believer, I know everyone has faults, but I cannot use that to claw my way up to feel superior either from that knowledge or from the comparison of sins. All sin is equal, and each person must recognize and understand the weight of their own. Comparison has been detrimental to my own life, both in my thoughts and in my relationships. I realize I am not alone in this, but I

also must recognize the weight it carries. In this case, I use other people's flaws to make myself feel or appear better. This form of selfishness causes self-esteem issues and puts people's mental health in danger. These ideas have solidified to me that we live in a "me"-based culture, place where if you are not looking out for yourself, you will not be successful. It is about what I can do to make myself appear more than what I really am. People ask us to think about others' weaknesses that we do not possess and use it as a persuasion to choose us over the other. The world has given us a measure that proves to be fake and unreasonable. However, in the Christian perspective, God's standards are very real and have already been obtained through God's Son. Recognizing the immenseness of that has taken the burden from my own back because I never had to carry it in the first place.

The last feature of selfishness that stood out to me is the intentionality of getting what one wants. Pride can be a slippery slope for some people depending on what path they are on, but others may decide that they are and always will be their number one priority. They admit to not care for others and are content to live that way. In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis paints a picture of people coming from hell to experience heaven. They can choose how far they will go and if they want to stay. However, some people who have been in Hell the longest are the least likely to even choose to see what Heaven is like (Lewis, 1946, pg. 11). He visualizes Hell as a place where people have no needs. "You get everything you want (not very good quality, of course) by just imagining it" (Lewis, 1946, pg. 13). They cannot even imagine anything being better than getting whatever you want whenever you want. Another woman within this book refused to experience Heaven anymore until she saw her husband there. She reasoned that she needed to control someone else for her own survival. She did not truly love him and would only continue once he could be under her authority.

That sort of pride permeates one's personality. It has the habit of taking control and rarely looking back. Lewis describes these people as being "deaf" with fists and teeth "clenched" and "eyes fast shut. First, they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouth for food, or their eyes to see" (Lewis, 1946, pg. 139). Pride can one of Satan's manipulating tactics. He "loves curing a small fault by giving you a great one" (Lewis, 1952, pg. 127). We cannot turn to selfishness after conquering a different area in life. While reading this I thought of it as the most dangerous of them all. To me it seems like an innate desire to push everyone down who gets in their way. I realize that someone who may deal with this sort of pride must have experienced some sort of pain to retaliate in a way like that. Pride is cyclical, and it can affect anyone around us which may cause them to react in selfish ways as well.

Emotions

Emotions are a driving force in people's lives and even the most influential force in some. They are what make us humans, but how we harness and control them can affect how we live. Lewis recognized this phenomenon in many of his books. If we rely on emotions too much, we may not be able to see truth. And yet, if we do not rely on our emotions at all, we can become cold and indifferent to those around us. Lewis even critiqued this in his book *The Abolition of Man*. "For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity" (Lewis, 1944, pg. 13). I relate in the way of indifference. Our culture glorifies independence as strength, teaching people that the goal is to need no one and nothing to survive but only yourself. In *The Screwtape Letters*, this is similar to the demon's strategy to take down the soul to which he has been assigned. Emotions can tempt people to do things they may not do without them.

Since emotions affect how people behave, it is easy to rely on those feelings as a guide through life.

Even as a believer, this is a struggle. We can experience a myriad of emotions that are all true and valid. And yet, we must have control over how much they dictate our thoughts and actions throughout our lives. Sometimes emotions may be set equal to reality as if every emotion we feel is the truth of a situation. However, when considering relationships, people do not need to rely on the feeling of love to know that they truly love someone. Marriage becomes an important idea to consider within this topic as well. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis addresses marriage within the Christian worldview. Feelings and emotions are fleeting, temporary (Lewis, 1952). Why rely on those as resounding indication of how healthy one's marriage is? So many factors play a part in how we feel. There does not always have to be a strong emotion towards someone to make that person important to your life. In the same way, when people consider having a relationship with God it can be tempting to manufacture feelings toward what we think we should feel (Lewis, 1942, pg. 17). Lewis even noted this when discussing his conversion to Christianity. "When we set out, I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion" (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 116). I have had to remember this truth, "though our feelings come and go, His love for us does not" (Lewis, 1952, pg. 133). We can recognize how inconsistent we are and also know the consistency of God.

In my own life, I saw emotions as a weakness. I never let myself feel strongly about things or share whenever I did. And when I became a believer, I still struggled with that. Growing up in a Christian household can surround someone with so many accounts and testimonies of conversion, and they usually involve exciting and emotional transformations.

However, the reality of it is that not all people experience God in this way. There are moments when we can and will feel a lot of emotion, but not everyone has the same amount of outward emotion coming from within. The “patient” in *The Screwtape Letters* dealt with these things as well. The demon encouraged his nephew Wormwood to convince him that this spiritual dryness in his life would last forever. As a result, the patient would, of his own efforts, try to recapture the feeling when he first knew God (Lewis, 1942, pg. 45). It becomes tempting to do the same in my own life. If I do not have a testimony filled with strong emotions, then maybe it isn’t true at all. It would be easy to think that embellishing things would give me more security, but it did not. Holding on to what true did and still does.

I not only battled with manufacturing the spiritual high feelings but also allowing the negative emotions overwhelm me. The feeling of shame can come from many places, but I think in my own life it came from pain I experienced in my life and not allowing myself to heal from it. Lewis even recognized this as a tactic to steer Christians away from their faith. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the demon was instructed to manipulate the patient’s feelings of hatred and fear to turn them into shame, one of the most effective emotions (Lewis, 1942, pg. 160). “I sometimes think that shame, mere awkward, senseless shame, does as much toward preventing good acts and straightforward happiness as any of our vices can do” (Lewis, 1961, pg. 9). This same shame has plagued me and kept me from the good things of the world.

Faith, Reason, & Science

In *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*, Lewis presents multiple arguments for the existence of God and the supernatural. Being a very renowned scholar, he devoted his life to philosophy and obtaining as much knowledge as possible to be the best. When he became a Christian, he used everything he learned to apply philosophy when providing evidence of God. As I

mentioned before, I listened to a podcast by Rhett McLaughlin and Link Neal who discussed their spiritual journeys. Lewis's ideas and their pushback began weaving through my thoughts. I recognized that some of the factors that led these two men towards unbelief are similar to the way Lewis tried to prove his point: reason. However, the one thing that must always be accounted for when talking about Christianity is faith; it is the foundation.

Lewis relates in *The Screwtape Letters* that one way to diminish someone's faith is by shifting his or her focus on the historical Jesus (Lewis, 1942, pg. 126). Many sources accept the fact that Jesus was a real person in history. The demon Screwtape encouraged this because it can make someone think of Jesus only as one may think of oneself. If we diminish the glory and divinity of Jesus, we will live an idle life with no base or foundation. It becomes worthless without recognizing all of who Jesus was and is. Rhett mentioned this as well within his account. He addressed that the historical Jesus within apologetics seemed to be survive only on the fact that Jesus was a significant person in history. He felt as if there was no other evidence to support His divinity and, as a result, apologetics should not play a role in determining the truth of Christian beliefs. Additionally, Lewis points out that by devoting one's whole life to proving God can lead one away from Him. In *The Great Divorce*, there were people from Hell who had tried all their lives to prove God, but didn't know Him or care about what He did, who He was, and who Christ was and is. They were so focused on one thing that they forgot the purpose and reason of it all (Lewis, 1946, pgs. 73-74).

After discussing what evidence Rhett accumulated over years of research that supported the lack of Jesus' divinity and no account of the resurrection, he stated that the only way he would understand someone's life devoted to the Christian beliefs would be through faith alone. He could not understand, with all the scientific evidence that has been found, how people could

argue with what he saw as very miniscule evidence that science proves Jesus' divinity and resurrection (McLaughlin & Neal, 2020). I began to recognize the doubts within my own life, but not on the truth but the process by which people take to try and convince people of Christianity. I rejoice at the fact that there is evidence of things that are uncertain, but there is also evidence against what we believe. We have theories given to us left and right within science and the different ones conflict over the same idea. Yes, these theories are based on long hours of research and review and have substantial support, but they are theories, nonetheless. And when we see multiple theories explaining the origin of the universe, all we can do is choose which one we desire to believe. As believers, we begin by faith which is believing in something that is not seen. Even more so, it is trusting that even when things do not make sense, we can still believe in who God says He is despite what is going on in the world today.

I hesitate to sound ignorant of facts. However, much of what is argued is truly based upon theory, and even Lewis addresses the logic that can accompany our faith. In *Miracles*, he discusses how if there is a supernatural God who created nature and everything in it, he is also above it and beyond it as well. God is above every social construct and scientific observation. He has broken the law of gravity and makes His interference with the nature He has created. If God was bound by the things He created, we might as well worship nature itself because they would be of equal power. But God "interferes" by His supernatural power with the natural world in which we live (Lewis, 1947). Lewis also states that nature responds and reacts to God's interference, doing as it would do in any circumstance (Lewis, 1947, pg. 95). An example of this is what Lewis describes as the miracle of the old creation. These miracles are the ones that are natural processes but in a small and close way such as the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. God is doing what he always has done like turning one seed of corn into multiple

crops, He just does it in a different way (Lewis, 1947, pg. 222). God has a beautiful relationship with the nature He created. The miracle of the resurrection is that of a new creation, the first of its kind. It is beyond understanding and much of it must be believed by faith and experience. Maybe the best things are those that we understand least (Lewis, 1961, pg. 75).

Experiencing who God is becomes a significant aspect of one's faith. By accepting the faith, we may begin to understand how things work (Lewis, 1952, pg. 55). Our reasoning can be paired with our experiences with the supernatural God. Lewis refers to the phrase "taste and see" in the book of Psalms in the Bible (Lewis, 1947, pg. 145). It is a way of saying, experience this for yourself, do not just take my word on it, but immerse yourself in who God is and you will see. There may be people like me who do not jump into every opportunity that is presented to them. I weigh out the pros and the cons and take time to understand and conceptualize it before I put myself out there. I struggled with this aspect of faith because I thought that if I do not understand it or believe I cannot do it well, I give up and claim that it must not be important. However, I know that there are some things you cannot know about until you experience it. It is like trying to describe one of the seven wonders of the world through words. There are no words great enough or pictures explanatory enough to replicate the experience. I believe the same applies with the Christian faith.

Rhett also reminded me of the way I was brought up. I recognize the importance of being well-rounded and not being ignorant of the world around me. Additionally, if I believe in something that is truth, I need to support that argument if I desire others to believe in that truth as well. What I felt went wrong was the concentration of learning about the apologetics in the Christian faith while not learning the arguments against it. Anyone should have all the facts and use them to ascertain what the true conclusion may be. I would read books and articles about the

historical value of the Bible as well as the science behind God as the Creator. Those writings were important, and some would address the arguments against Christianity, but we never addressed the people who held those opposing beliefs. We never studied what reasonings people may have as to why they believe those things. Our beliefs are based on faith, and we need to be relating and listening to the people instead of building up an arsenal of attacks or defenses. We are called to be ready to defend the faith, but we are first called to love others.

Being devoted to the faith comes with many transformations and experiences. Believers see the work of Christ within our own lives. God's goodness flows through us, it doesn't come from us (Lewis, 1952, pg. 63). Lewis lists the many virtues that should be evident in a Christian's life like prudence, justice, respect, charity, and most importantly love. God desires for us to continue to increase in knowledge and become more like Christ. Believers begin doing these things when we do these things not in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save us already (Lewis, 1952, pg. 147). Once believers start behaving as if they were Jesus, they will become more like Him, but it is only through His power. "New thoughts, until they have themselves become habitual will affect your consciousness as a whole only while you are actually thinking them: (Lewis, 1947, pg. 271). Believers must guard themselves from being distracted from the main purpose of the Christian faith. We can fall into worshipping different aspects or likenesses of God instead of God Himself (Lewis, 1947, pg. 186).

Once Saved Always Saved

My thoughts have always stumbled over the idea of predestination and that once someone is saved, their salvation is always secure. I have done my own research trying to tackle the issue. I am in the minority when I lean against these theological beliefs. I am not to the point where I can confidently say one way or the other, but I struggle to believe those ideas. Throughout

Lewis's books, he would state things that also seemed to oppose the view of "once saved, always saved." Rhett and Link's podcast seemed to also negate this view. Many of the arguments for it quote Scripture that can be understood as once a decision is made to believe, that salvation can never be taken away by anyone, even one's own self. I struggled with this because there are many people proclaimed themselves as believers who then fell away. An explanation for this could be that they were never saved in the first place. However, how can someone from the outside make that judgment call?

As Rhett and Link discussed their spiritual deconstruction, they addressed the issue of what their faith was like before. They professed that they were completely devoted to God, in relationship with Him, and communicating with Him. Both of them had said that if they had heard a story like theirs, they would react in the same way others would, saying that they must not have been saved in the first place (McLaughlin & Neal, 2002). These issues become very difficult for me to understand and wrestle with. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis addressed this issue that even after the patient became a Christian, the demons never truly lost the battle for his soul until the patient died. I realize this work is more allegorical, but what would Lewis's point have been to continue to have Wormwood tempt the Christian man if there would be nothing to gain. The only thing they desired was the patient's soul (Lewis, 1942). By tempting the patient to not act on his faith, they believed they could get him back. Maybe Lewis hoped to convey the ignorance of the demons about the character of God and how salvation works, but Lewis's other works seem to allude to the same idea.

Lewis states, "In the same way a Christian can lose the Christ- life which has been put into him and he has to make efforts to keep it" (Lewis, 1952, pg. 62). In the book of James chapter two in verse 17 Paul writes, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"

(James 2:17 English Standard Version). If faith is the foundation of being a believer, then based on what Paul had said, there must be an instance where faith is without works. If believers do not act from their faith, I understand it as “losing Christ” as Lewis stated in *Mere Christianity*. We should daily come to a point of repentance in our lives knowing that we fail every day and rely on God who can live through us. We must actively remind ourselves of our beliefs, or we may “drift away” (Lewis, 1952, pg. 141).

At that point, it feels overwhelming to believe that my faith may not be secure based on what I do with it. However, I think it comes back to our dependence and reverence to God. These “reminders” of our beliefs involve reading Scripture, praying, being in community with other believer, and loving others just to name a few. Believers do this through the power of God and not on their own because it would be impossible. As I understand it, as long as our hearts remain surrendered to God, our faith is secure. I believe that is why it is so important to recognize sins that are tempting and actively seek to know God more. Lewis paints a picture of this in *The Great Divorce*. “Having allowed oneself to drift unresisting, unpraying, accepting every half-conscious solicitation from our desires, we reached a point where we no longer believed the Faith” (Lewis, 1946, pg. 38). However, if what I present is true, at what point or what amount of insufficient works constitute no faith? And if someone has no faith, have they lost their salvation to the point of eternal death? I cannot see how God would accept people who once knew Him and turned away. I do not desire to understand the mind of God or make claims about what is just. However, I feel as if Lewis’s works and my previous understanding of Scripture has guided me to this conclusion. Knowing this motivates me to work hard, rely on God, and not take a day for granted.

Surrender

Instead of being viewed in the negative sense of giving up, surrender gives believers a new life, one they were always meant to live. Lewis had to surrender his own life to become a Christian. Before his conversion, “he was still attacking religion- with, perhaps, some of the over-shrill contempt of the man who does not want to believe rather than of one who simply does not believe” (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 90). Even after pursuing a life of more knowledge and prestige, Lewis instead gave up those passions to pursue an even greater purpose which is God. And still, God gave used that passion for knowledge, reasoning, and creativity to do good for others and not for Lewis’s pride. I think of the child within many of us that wishes to be dependent on someone else again, that the weight we are carrying did not seem to be an issue when we were so young. We want to give it up and allow someone else to carry the load.

Lewis would put a lot of his focus on the issues and troubles the world has thrown at people. However, he always came to a point of relinquishing control of one’s own life to gain a even better one. “To what will you look for help if you will not look to that which is stronger than yourself” (Lewis, 1952, pg. 59). If we need help, we want to get advice from someone who knows or is an expert, and life works the same way. We have experienced and dealt with the problem of pain and selfishness, and surrender resolves the problem. “It is the change from being confident about our own efforts to the state in which we despair of doing anything for ourselves and leave it to God” (Lewis, 1952, pg. 146). However, if we do not recognize the problems earlier, there will be no need to surrender but also no experience of true love and joy.

We each have a choice in our journey through life. We all have the free will to make the decisions we want whether good or bad. While doing this, we are progressing towards being in harmony with God and being an enemy of God; every choice builds on who we will become

(Lewis, 1952). Our intentions and the state of our hearts determine what path we are leading. The pain and suffering we have carried with us do not need to be as heavy of a weight as we make them out to be. Surrender gives freedom and opportunity. Lewis put this in great perspective in his works. I always knew I struggled with letting things go, but I also recognized my failures when I did not surrender. The idea of it made me feel weak and even less human to have to rely on someone else to go through my life journey successfully. However, Lewis's words reminded me of the freedom and positivity that comes from giving it up. He gave me a picture of what it looks like. We can only be our true selves in Him (Lewis, 1952, pg. 225). "But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything thrown in" (Lewis, 1952, pg. 226). God desires to give us every good thing based on His standard of good and not our own. He truly knows what is best for us.

This freedom can be a step full of fear. When we let things go, we allow someone to see the deepest parts of who we are. We become extremely vulnerable to the other. One of the passengers from Hell to Heaven in *The Great Divorce* noted a similar feeling "It gave me a feeling of freedom, but also of exposure, possible of danger, which continued to accompany me through all that followed" (Lewis, 1946, pg. 20). Surrender is uncomfortable and not a natural way of life in the world which we live. We tend to push back against the act of fully letting go. Lewis experienced this in his own life when he tried to push God away. "He was still hoping that he might not be interfered with and be allowed to retain his freedom when God closed in on him" (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 103). Lewis recognized the pursuit God had on his own life. It was a "steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me... the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore

that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?... The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation” (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 103). Lewis’s story of surrender is not everyone’s story, but it paints a beautiful picture of the God of the universe and His pursuit for each person.

We hesitate to admit that we cannot deal with the chaos in our lives on our own, and we try to maintain any independence we have left no matter how small of an area it is. This cannot fool God. He can see our weak foundation within ourselves. It may look strong when comparing it to others, but it is nothing compared with what kind of life we could be living when surrendered to God. His goodness will not allow His children to withhold parts of themselves when he knows He can do vastly greater things with those same parts. God will knock down my “house of cards” as many times as is necessary until I fully relent and grasp my faith with full assurance (Lewis, 1961, pg. 68).

An appalling realization came to me when reading through *The Problem of Pain*. I have always perceived that there are many people who wish to feel special or unique in the world. With so many people, we can drown in the weight of others’ fame and talent while we go about our normal lives. I felt that way on a much deeper level in my life. Growing up in a Christian home and in church I knew that everyone was fallen and full of wrong and that Jesus came to pay the punishment for that. Knowing that he did it for everyone was astounding, but it continued to make me feel small. I had a desire to be someone’s only person, to be recognized as the favorite or as one who had some incomparable characteristic. Being deeply rooted in selfishness, I still sought that in my friends and family, just to feel special and chosen. But Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain*, reformed these desires and put into perspective how my faith has

fulfilled that for me. He talks about our home in heaven, how it is made for us “stitch by stitch” (Lewis, 1940, pg. 152).

God also promises to give believers a new name when we go on to eternal life. Not only that, but He sees each person in a special and individual way. “But God will look to every soul like its first love because He is its first love” (Lewis, 1940, pg. 152). I realized that in the midst of saving an entire world, God still chooses me and points me out to know me in every way He can. It is a continuous relationship of someone wanting every part of me. And when I surrender my desires, hopes, and plans I have for my life, I have the opportunity to love and appreciate a part of God that resounds within me more than any other person. An aspect of God that would fill the deep recesses of my heart. “Surely, that each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the Divine beauty better than any other creature can” (Lewis, 1940, pg. 154). Each one of us has a purpose that other people cannot mimic. It can be similar, but it is not the same, and that has given me so much hope for my life. Death is not the end for believers, and we have to submit to it and not fear it. To get to Heaven, everything in us must submit to death and become a new creation. We are then made into a new spirit strong enough to be in the presence of God (Lewis, 1946).

Hope

The last thing that I experienced to the full while reading through these books was the hope that emanated from Lewis’s words. As a believer, we have a lot of hope for what is to come past this life on earth. When Wormwood, in *The Screwtape Letters*, “lost his patient” or could not secure his soul in Hell, Lewis described the man’s death as “sheer, instantaneous liberation” (Lewis, 1942, pg. 172). This is the hope Christians have. Death is the final act that takes us to where we belong. Lewis observed that “those focused on the next life, do more for this life”

(Lewis, 1952, pg. 135). Death is not the end anymore but the beginning. It is “the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered...it is holy and unholy, our supreme disgrace and our only hope.” (Lewis, 1947, pg. 203). The greatest miracle to have happened is the incarnation of Jesus, and even though that event proves to be divisive, miracles interrupt nature and our own reasoning (Lewis, 1947). Jesus defeated death, and “only the greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell” (Lewis, 1946, pg. 139).

The other greatest miracle that gives hope is the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’ whole life proclaimed hope. Lewis put it this way: “In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity, down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the room ancient and premium phases of life; down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature he has created. But he goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him” (Lewis, 1947, pg. 179). The new life he created is then given to us if we choose to accept it.

Jesus fills the deepest, long-felt desire and the source of joy that is directly connected to Heaven (Lewis, 1940, pg. 150). The effects of accepting this hope are described as joyful and energizing (Lewis, 1952, pg. 174). Lewis describes the hope-filled relationship as a dance that we are asked to join (Lewis, 1952, pg. 176). When we surrender, we do not lose everything but gain everything. We become the very thing we were created to be. Our anticipation comes from knowing there is something greater for us out there. “Our faith refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns but will not encourage us to mistake them for home” (Lewis, 1940, pg. 116). I have always desired this hope and assurance. I did not recognize it for what it truly was until I was older. There are some things that are harder to grasp as a child. Lewis used some of the best analogies possible to try to convey the hope we have in Christian faith. It continued to become

real to me and helped me re-prioritize the things in my own life. Materialism becomes so tempting to fall into, but everything that we see now is temporary and just a small picture of what we could truly experience.

At the end of Lewis's life, his friends remarked on how his death was full of hope. They referred to a passage from the last book of the Narnia series. Aslan, a lion, represents God and is talking with His children at the edge of Heaven. I desire for my entrance into life to be full of joy and excitement like this. "Then Aslan turned to them and said: '...you are-as you used to call it in the Shadowlands-dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning...' And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before" (Green & Hooper, 1974, pg. 308).

Conclusion

My journey with C.S. Lewis started earlier than I had anticipated, as a young child. He brought me joy and imagination, creativity and excitement. However, I did not know what would be in store for me in my continued journey through his life and thoughts. He taught me more about myself, my faith, brought me joy and confusion. Even if someone were at odds with his beliefs, he or she would at least recognize Lewis's ability to inspire and encourage deep thought. To join with him in his thoughts and faith, sharing his joys and sorrows, is an experience I would participate in again and for other scholars like him. If the small journey for my readers even

sparked a conversation or challenged critical thought, I am pleased. However, I am still grateful for the work of Lewis by God and the elements that surrounded me.

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